

U. S. Effort to Aid U-2 Pilot Cited

By FRANCES LIDE
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The mission of the ill-fated U-2 May Day flight over Russia was concealed by the United States Government in its first statement on the incident in an effort to help the pilot get out of the USSR, if he were still alive, and able, a White House official said yesterday.

The pilot was under instructions to try to get out of Russia, if his craft were downed, and he had elaborate equipment to help him, Robert E. Merriam, Deputy Assistant to the President for Interdepartmental Affairs, told a Capitol Hill Club ladies' luncheon group.

When Nikita Khrushchev announced May 5 that the Soviets had shot down an American plane, the whereabouts of the pilot was not yet known, Mr. Merriam recalled.

Help for Pilot

So the "cover story," he said, was decided upon to help the pilot escape, if possible.

(On May 6, the State Department said the Soviet forces might have shot down an unarmed, high-altitude jet used in weather research.)

After Premier Khrushchev announced on May 7, however, that the pilot was alive, his story was analyzed and it became clear that he had the facts—that the pilot was a prisoner and that he had told his mission, Mr. Merriam continued.

At this point, the United States Government faced the problem of stating the facts as they existed or putting out an additional statement that could not be sustained, the speaker noted.

So Secretary of State Herter decided to state the story in its complete essence, he added.

Mr. Merriam related the sequence of events leading to admission that the plane piloted by Francis G. Power was on an intelligence flight in an informal talk at a luncheon held in the Capitol Hill Club gardens.

The speaker, who was the "mystery guest" of the day, noted that critics have asked why such flights had not been discontinued when the summit conference was due to begin in mid-May.

In answer, he recalled that Pearl Harbor was attacked while Japanese emissaries were in Washington to negotiate with the then Secretary of State Cordell Hull.

Mr. Merriam also gave a statistical picture of the armed might of the United States, declaring it adds up to a "deterrent force of such incredible capacity that no enemy will dare to attack us."

Honor guests at the luncheon were Mrs. C. Norman Brunsdale, wife of the Senator from North Dakota, who was appointed to succeed the late Senator William Langer until the special election next month, and Mrs. Everett Dirksen, wife of the Senate Minority Leader.

Substitutes for Mrs. Fong

Mrs. Dirksen substituted for Mrs. Hiram Fong, wife of the Senator from Hawaii, who has gone to Buenos Aires with her husband for Argentina's sesquicentennial celebration. Senator Fong is

an official representative from the Senate at the ceremonies.

Mrs. Dirksen was lauded by Mrs. William S. Culbertson, the luncheon chairman, as the "woman back of the Senator" who has made "such a wonderful leader" of the G.O.P. in the Senate.

Mr. Merriam also paid high tribute to Senator Dirksen, declaring that "we in the White House are continuously in awe of the amount of work he does" and "of his skill as a legislator and his tremendous capability as a leader in the Senate."

Head table guests also included Mrs. Romulo, wife of the Philippine Ambassador, and Mrs. Yang, wife of the former Korean Ambassador.